



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Massachusetts State Office

451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002
413-253-4350, fax 413-253-4375
www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Diane Baedeker Petit
NRCS Public Affairs Officer
413-253-4371, cell: 508-965-8417

State and federal partners contribute resources to meet increased demand for conservation planning on Massachusetts farms

AMHERST, Mass. (October 5, 2007) – Due to increasing demand for conservation planning assistance on Massachusetts farms, the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), and the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) have agreed to contribute additional federal and state resources to accelerate delivery of conservation technical assistance.

The agreement among NRCS, MDAR and MACD will strengthen a partnership between federal state and local organizations known as the Accelerated Conservation Planning Partnership (ACPP). Through the ACPP, Bay State farmers can get help with planning, designing and implementing conservation practices that contribute to agricultural viability, improve water, protect soil and plant health, and restore wildlife habitat.

NRCS and MDAR are contributing \$225,000 each to the effort. The \$450,000 is in addition to the technical and financial assistance that NRCS provides to local farmers. Last year, NRCS delivered more than \$2.7 million in technical assistance and nearly \$12 million in financial assistance for natural resource conservation in Massachusetts.

The ACPP was established in 2004 by NRCS, MDAR and MACD when the groups joined forces to improve the delivery of federal and state conservation programs and services to Massachusetts farmers. MACD employs nine conservation planning and administrative staff through the ACPP, who are housed in USDA service centers across the state.

"ACPP's local coordination with Massachusetts conservation districts is helping to address the needs of the farming community," said Marjorie Cooper, president of MACD and owner of Cooper's Hilltop Farm in Rochdale, Mass. "The ACPP staff members are well-versed in state and federal government conservation programs, which greatly enhances the service they provide to farmers."

"The ACPP has grown into a vibrant and successful partnership that has made significant contributions to accelerating conservation planning in the commonwealth," said Christine S. Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. "Our agency's workload associated with the 2002 Farm Bill programs has steadily increased over the past five years, which makes it challenging to meet the demand for conservation planning on local farms."

-- MORE --

“Several state programs have come to rely on the ACP as an effective vehicle for delivery of services. For example, to be eligible for the state Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program, a farmer must have an updated NRCS conservation plan. Development and updates of those plans have been facilitated by the ACP,” said Scott Soares, Massachusetts Acting Commissioner of Agricultural Resources. “And, to apply for the state Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program a farmer needs NRCS soils and land use maps that can now be produced by MACD staff.”

Farmers who would like assistance with conservation planning should contact their local USDA service center. USDA service center locations are listed on-line at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the phone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture. General program information is available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that helps people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment. NRCS has seven Massachusetts field offices in Greenfield, Hadley, Holden, Hyannis, Pittsfield, Westford, and West Wareham, which work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the commonwealth.

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' mission is to support, promote and enhance the long-term viability of Massachusetts agriculture with the aim of helping this state's agricultural businesses become as economically and environmentally sound as possible.

MACD is an association of the 14 conservation districts in Massachusetts, which were established under state law to carry out programs for the conservation and wise management of soil, water and related resources. Each district is governed by a board of supervisors – locally elected citizens who volunteer their time and leadership to the conservation effort.

#